

**SERMON: "WHAT SHALL I RETURN TO THE LORD?"**  
**TEXT: OLD TESTAMENT PSALM 116**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Anyone who has spent any time in our home, sooner or later, after looking around a bit, asks the same questions  
"You are a Georgia fan, aren't you?" and "What's up with all the LBJ stuff?"  
One is about me. Yes, I am a both a fan and a graduate  
The other is about my dad. He was a Secret Service agent with the Johnsons.

If our guests get even more inquisitive, they ask another question ...  
"What's up with all the pigs?" That one is about my mom.  
She liked pigs. So I gave her some kind of pig thing every year ... Mother's Day, birthday and Christmas – little pigs, big pigs, pig planters, lots of pigs.

After my parents died and my brothers and I went through their estate, the things they designated to each of us, the things we had to figure out ourselves, I learned a lesson ... All the things you gave to your parents at some stage of life, you get back. That is why we have so many pigs and that is why they are proudly displayed, displayed with a sense of thanksgiving

I couldn't help thinking about those pigs as I thought and prayed about this psalm, in particular, verse 12 and the question, "**What shall I return to the LORD for all his bounty to me?**" The word 'return' stuck out to me, giving back.  
Got me to thinking - Taking into consideration all the gifts that God has given us, all of them, over all the years ... what does God get back?

Every year I approach the stewardship effort the same way taking the same first step. That step is intentional gratitude, looking around and taking stock of all that God has given me, including parents passing down pigs.  
Then encouraging you to do the same thing, be grateful on purpose with purpose

Stewardship, whatever the theme chosen for that year, is pretty much the same  
It's the church's way of challenging us to take a good look around and give thanks for all we have received from God's generous hands

This year's theme is simple – Return. I admit I had a different context in mind.  
When I first came up with the idea, I thought it would be more return to normal.  
We're not there yet, I know ... but the theme still fits

## BECAUSE

Thinking about 'return,' I pray helps us see familiar things with a fresh set of eyes  
Longing to get back to some sense of what used to be, we realize  
how much we value the simple things – say dinner out with friends  
or the feel of a full church singing loud, you know sing the refrain loud

Looking around, looking back and looking forward to  
can lead to a certain sense of anxiety (we know that all too well)  
but doesn't it also deepen our appreciation for what we already have?  
for what we have and what God has done for us?

This question about "What shall I return to the Lord?"  
(We are going to be looking at bible passages featuring that word 'return')  
is asked amidst a song of thanksgiving. It starts with some simple honesty

**I love the LORD, because he has heard my voice and my supplications.  
Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long  
as I live. The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol  
laid hold on me; I suffered distress and anguish. Then I called on the  
name of the LORD: "O LORD, I pray, save my life!"**

Before we ask 'what shall I return to the Lord?'  
we consider 'what have I received from the Lord?'  
And that begins with the fact, the fact, that God hears, that God helps us  
**I love the LORD, because he has heard my voice and my supplications.**

There are many things we can thank God for  
Think about the beauty and bounty of creation. We thank God as Creator.  
There are plenty of sermons that can be preached on that  
along with songs to sing, foods to savor and smell

Were we to make a list of all that we have been given,  
those things, things we often take for granted, would fill the list.  
That said, isn't the psalmist really getting down to God's honest truth?  
God hears us and helps us when we need it most

The psalmist goes on from this very honest beginning  
**I love the LORD, because he has heard my voice and my supplications.**  
He spells out how God answered his prayers with the next few verses

**Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; our God is merciful. The LORD  
protects the simple; when I was brought low, he saved me. Return,  
O my soul, to your rest, for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.  
For you have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my  
feet from stumbling.**

## THE NEED TO GIVE THANKS

My list of things received from God begins with this.

God's help. God's healing. God's saving me, forgiving me.

Lots of people do their best to help us, and their help is a big help

But only the living God, a just and merciful God, can do  
what the psalmist is so honestly recounting

I remember a pretty good children's book. There are lots of good children's books.

We read it to our kids (and have it packed away for future reference)

It is Alexander's Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day

I like the way it ends (No, I won't tell you how it ends)

Truth is, some days are terrible, horrible, no good, very bad

There are days we don't much feel much like saying thank you,

days where it is easier to count our woes than it is to count our blessings

It is those days that knowing we can count on God is enough to get us through

It is those days, and the experience getting through them, that led to this psalm

and to the question ... **"What shall I return to the LORD for all his bounty to me?"**

That question is not some passage hand-selected by church fundraisers.

It is rooted in gratitude, gratitude rooted in our experiences of God's help.

My approach to stewardship, about giving to the church, is this. It is giving back!

Yes, the church needs your generous support to be "A Place for Everyone."

I think our excellent staff needs and deserves that support especially given

how hard they have worked though these days that demand flexibility

We need to increase our giving to keep on doing what we do, how we do it.

Those are good reasons to give generously

But the most basic reason to give is not that the church needs it

It is that we need to give, we need to give as a way of saying "thank you" to God

We need to return some of what God has given us back to God

though supporting ministry and the work of loving God and neighbor

We need to say thank you. And we need reminders to say "thank you."

I don't keep dozens of pig things around my house because I love pigs

I don't have LBJ stuff because I am a history nerd (even though I am)

I keep them to remind me to thank God for my family. I need reminders.

I need Sundays because I need reminders of how good God is to me

I need to hear about forgiveness and hope and grace

I need to be intentional about my gratitude.

If I am not, I find it too easy to grumble ... and that, I have learned  
doesn't really do me (or anyone around me) any good.

## SUMMARY

Gratitude keeps me grounded. It is also a pretty good guide.

Being grateful helps me see that whatever I give, I'm really giving back.

Being grateful helps me see that life isn't so much about taking  
as much as I can, carpe-ing that diem until there's not much diem left

That approach, and I've tried it too many times, just doesn't work

Think Pizza Ranch (and any other buffet)

That friend chicken is pretty good, so too the pizza

That is a good first plate of food ... and second

But you've made the same mistake I've made, haven't you?

It says all you can eat ... so I'm going to eat all I can eat

Your brain sends a message to your belly. "Hey, I paid for all you can eat,  
let's get our moneys' worth, get another plate or two or three"

I don't think "what shall I return to the Lord for all his bounty to me?"

easily translates into yet another return trip to the buffet

I don't think it means going back for thirds

I think it means giving back,

giving back to God from whom all blessings flow